

NSW Department of Sport and Recreation  
Active Community Guide

# Active Older Adults



13 13 02  
[www.dsr.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dsr.nsw.gov.au)





# Why should I be active?

One of the best ways of living a long and healthy life is through regular exercise. To some people, this seems like a daily chore, and many wonder how they can possibly fit this into their daily routine. However, physical activity comes in many shapes and forms, including gardening, housework, and walking to the shops to buy the milk or newspaper.

Regular physical activity helps to reduce the effects of ageing such as limited mobility, balance, flexibility and muscle strength. It also decreases the risk of heart problems and osteoporosis. The more active you are, the more oxygen that flows through the body and to the brain, which all leads to a happier, healthier you.

By participating in physical activity, you'll soon see and feel the positive effects of being able to bend, stretch and twist easier, you'll feel stronger and be able to carry more, and you'll be able to exercise for longer without getting tired and losing your breath.

**Research shows that older adults with active lifestyles are often as healthy as less active people aged 15 years younger.**



## How much should I do?

Doctors, health experts and sport and recreation professionals now recommend that adults of all ages do 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week. By exercising at a moderate pace, you'll increase your heart rate without feeling too out of breath.

The other good news is that the 30 minutes can be broken down into 10 minute blocks, making the daily amount of physical activity recommended much easier to achieve.

Once you get used to it, you'll find that there's lots of ways to incorporate physical activity into your day, even if it's for 10 minutes at a time.

**Inactivity is as harmful to your health as smoking.**

## It's never too late to start exercising

There are no rules or age limits to physical activity. Irrespective of how old you are or how often you have exercised in the past, there is no time like the present to begin doing regular physical activity. You'll begin to feel healthier and have more energy almost immediately.

The important thing about taking regular activity is to start today. Don't keep making excuses about being too busy, too old or too unhealthy. Just 30 minutes every day can keep you feeling younger, healthier and more energetic. Everyone, including people with physical limitations and chronic conditions, can benefit from increasing their physical activity.



Once you become more active, you'll find you have more energy, sleep better, feel more self confident, have reduced stress levels, can more easily control your weight, blood pressure and cholesterol. You will also lower the risks of heart disease, diabetes, falls and injuries, obesity, stroke, osteoporosis, and colon cancer. What more incentive do you need to get started today?

Of course, if you have not done any regular exercise for a long time, you should speak to your doctor first to work out a suitable level of activity for you.

**No more excuses – get started today!**

## Before you start

You should not do any vigorous activity unless you've worked up to it and you're doing it regularly. If you haven't been exercising regularly for a while, speak to your doctor about the best forms of activity for you. It is very important to talk to your doctor if you:

- Have ever suffered chest pains, high blood pressure or heart disease
- Have ever had chest problems like asthma or bronchitis
- Have had back trouble or a slipped disc
- Have had joint pains or arthritis
- Have diabetes
- Have recently recovered from illness or an operation
- Are worried that exercise may affect your health.



This is not to say that these conditions will exclude you from physical activity. In fact your doctor will probably advise that you do regular physical activity but will explain the safest way to establish a suitable routine.

Don't do physical activity:

- If the weather is very hot, humid or cold
- Straight after meals or alcohol
- If you feel unwell, pain or dizziness
- If you feel unusually tired
- If you have the flu or a fever.

To make exercising safe and enjoyable:

- Wear comfortable, loose clothes and supportive shoes
- Work hard enough to make you a little sweaty and out of breath, but not uncomfortably so – you should still be able to carry on a conversation
- Wear a broad brimmed hat, sunscreen and sunglasses when outdoors
- Avoid the hottest times of the day
- Don't wait until you feel thirsty – drink plenty of water before, during and after activity
- Stretch before and after exercise to help avoid muscle soreness and injury
- Build up your activity levels over several weeks.

**Start out slowly and gradually increase daily physical activity.**



## How do I get started?

Getting started can be as simple as walking to the shops, taking the steps instead of the escalator, or getting off the bus one stop earlier. Once you've started to do these simple things, it's then time to build on these activities and do them for longer. Choose activities that you enjoy – you'll be surprised at how quickly time goes by.

It's important to exercise at times that suit you otherwise it will feel like a chore. You should aim to fit physical activity into your everyday schedule.

Remember, there are so many ways to enjoy physical activity – from exercising alone, with friends or joining social or sporting clubs for group activities.

There are hundreds of different physical activities you can do. The trick is to find the ones that appeal to you. As a starting point, here are some options:

- **Walking** – one of the most natural exercises of all
- **Gentle exercise classes** – great for social interaction, and exercising in a group may help keep you motivated
- **Aqua aerobics** – a group exercise class done in the water, and you don't need to be able to swim
- **Weight training** – helps to keep bones and muscles strong, tones your body and makes you more supple
- **Tai Chi** – a martial arts form of exercise involving a physical workout, relaxation and skilled learning.

If you need help finding out about activities available in your local area phone 13 13 02 or search the Active Search database on the web site [www.dsr.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dsr.nsw.gov.au).

**Be active every day in as many ways as you can.**



## Maintain a healthy diet

You should complement your physical activity program with a healthy diet. Following are some dietary guidelines for older adults:

- Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods and eat daily from each of the following food groups:

*Bread, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles*

*Vegetables including legumes*

*Fruit*

*Milk, yoghurt and cheese*

*Meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts and legumes*

- Eat at least three meals every day or eat small amounts often if you don't have much of an appetite
- Care for your food: prepare and store it correctly
- Eat plenty of vegetables (including legumes) and fruits
- Eat plenty of cereals, breads and pastas
- Eat a diet low in saturated fat
- Drink adequate amounts of water or other fluids
- If you drink alcohol, limit your intake
- Choose foods low in salt and use salt sparingly
- Include foods high in calcium
- Use added sugar in moderation.

**A healthy diet provides the fuel for an active lifestyle.**



**Meet Annette (64)**



'When I was working as a school teacher I always thought I was too busy to participate regularly in physical activity. But when I developed severe osteoarthritis, I knew I had to do something to maintain my mobility as I grew older.

I started going to aqua aerobics three mornings a week before school, and also joined a Tai Chi class one day a week. With my new exercise program I went from using a walking stick almost all the time to walking unassisted. In addition, I found that I didn't need to visit the physiotherapist anymore.

Since retiring from teaching, I have joined a group called 'Young at Heart' at my local leisure centre. We do all sorts of things like aqua aerobics, stretch and strengthening gym classes and walks around the area. I purchased an off-peak membership to the leisure centre which was a lot cheaper than a full membership.

I have made a whole new circle of friends through 'Young at Heart' and we see each other socially as well – some of us go out to dinner once a week and we organise trips to the theatre. Deciding to be active is one of the best decisions I ever made.'



**Meet Denzil (63)  
and Colleen (61)**



'We are very conscious of the need to keep fit and mobile as we get older,' said Colleen.

'The easiest form of exercise for us to fit into our day is walking.

We own a dog and need to exercise him regularly, so every morning we take the dog for a walk up to our local shops where we buy the newspaper and anything else we might need that day. We actually stopped getting the paper delivered to make sure we weren't tempted to skip a day!

I must admit, Denzil found our daily walk a bit of a chore at first, but now we really enjoy this time together. We have met a lot of our neighbours this way and often stop to talk to people that we pass.

Something we have been thinking about recently is starting swimming. We both are not very confident in the water, but know it is an excellent form of exercise. We are going to look into adult learn to swim classes so we can get enough confidence to get started. If we could swim, we also wouldn't have to miss out when the rest of the family are enjoying themselves in our son's backyard swimming pool!



**Meet Mario (68)**



'I was looking for ways to get fit and healthy and also to meet some new friends when I heard about a gentle exercise class organised by the local community health centre. It was hard to join the class at first because there were hardly any men who went, but now there are some who go every week. I think someone just needed to be the one to join in first! Our class has also formed a display team that performs at different community events.

I suggested to the people at the community health centre that we start up a walking group for the local Portugese community. I am Portugese myself, and worry about the older people in the community who are not active and seem very isolated in their homes.

We walk once a week, sometimes in our local area and sometimes we get public transport to other parts of the city like national parks or beaches. For a lot of people in our group, there is no way they would have the confidence to go to these places on their own because a lot of them live alone and have limited English skills.

Many friendships have been made through our walking group. We have gone away on trips together, and to dinners and dances. Being active has not only improved my health but has made me new friends, given me a lot of self confidence and a chance to help others in my community.'



If you need help finding out about activities available  
in your local area phone 13 13 02 or search the  
Active Search online directory at [www.dsr.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dsr.nsw.gov.au)

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